

1. Greetings

2. I will go quickly through the slide presentation for the Tradition starting with a summary of Bill's essay (from the 12 & 12). Don't worry... if I go too fast, it will be available on my website at www.onwhatslenderthreads.com. My objective will be to hit the highpoints, so that we have plenty of time for discussion.

3. Discussions and questions. Everyone is invited to share anything that they have learned about that Tradition. I get so much knowledge from participants!

Disclaimers about this workshop

On What Slender Threads: A.A.'s Twelve Traditions from a Historical Perspective.

No need to purchase the book.

Audios and slides are posted on www.onwhatslenderthreads.com under “Workshop Resources”

Made possible by General Service Office literature, published research of historians, and wonderful friends in A.A. world-wide.

Any inferences in this study are strictly my own and in no way reflect the opinion of Alcoholics Anonymous

In keeping with the Eleventh and Twelfth Traditions, I try to avoid using the last names of any alcoholics including Bill W. and Dr. Bob.

Having explored Traditions 1 – 7, Bill's composition is approaching a crescendo! His musical score opened with an attention-getting blast on the importance of A.A. unity and melodically continued with how A.A.s could avoid discordant sounds and distracting noise.

Tradition 8 provides the supporting notes needed so that A.A.'s harmony can be heard by unseen alcoholics. A.A. will always be non-professional, but we will employ special workers who make our Twelfth Step work possible.

Almost entirely unorganized, and completely nonprofessional, this mighty spiritual current is now flowing from alcoholics who are well to those who are sick. One alcoholic talking to another; that's all.... No, this great life-giving stream can never be dammed up by paid do-gooders or professionals. LoH 86

We believe that [paid staff] should be recompensed in reasonable relation to the value of his or her similar services or abilities in the commercial world....cheap help is apt to feel insecure and be inefficient. This is neither good spirituality nor good business. AA Service Manual C-44 to C-45



Tradition 8

Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

The Original Point (Long Form): *Our A.A. experience has taught us that:*

Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional. We define professionalism as the occupation of counseling alcoholics for fees or hire. But we may employ alcoholics where they are going to perform those services for which we might otherwise have to engage nonalcoholics. Such special services may be well recompensed. But our usual A.A. Twelfth Step work is never to be paid for.

(Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, 160, 191)

Tradition 8 – Bill’s Essay pp. 168 - 173

Alcoholics Anonymous will **never have a professional class.**

Every time we have tried to professionalize our Twelfth Step, the result has been exactly the same: **Our single purpose has been defeated.**

Alcoholics simply will not listen to a paid twelfth-stepper. Almost from the beginning, we have been positive that face-to-face work with the alcoholic who suffers could be based **only on the desire to help and be helped.**

The **money motive compromises** [the A.A. who talks for money] and everything he says and does for his prospect.

... few subjects have been the cause of **more contention** within our Fellowship than **professionalism.**

Tradition 8 – Bill’s Essay pp. 168 - 173

Caretakers ... cooks ... secretaries ... authors ...-- all these we have seen hotly assailed because they were, ...”making money out of A.A.” , these workers ... these labors were not Twelfth Step jobs at all.

The critics attacked as AA. Professionals these workers of ours who were often doing **thankless tasks that no one else could or would do.**

Even greater furors were provoked when A.A. members began to run rest homes and farms for alcoholics, when some hired out to corporations as personnel men in charge of the alcoholic problem in industry, when some became nurses on alcoholic wards, when others entered the field of alcohol education.

At last, however, **a plain line of cleavage could be seen between professionalism and nonprofessionalism.**

Tradition 8 – Bill’s Essay pp. 168 – 173

When we had agreed that the Twelfth Step couldn’t be sold for money, we had been wise.

But when we had declared that our Fellowship couldn’t hire service workers nor could any A.A. member carry our knowledge into other fields, we were taking **the counsel of fear, fear which today has been largely dispelled in the light of experience.**

club janitor and cook ...answer its telephone ... look after the place The job was not to *do* Twelfth Step work; **it was to make Twelfth Step work possible.**

Neither could A.A. itself function without full-time workers. Foundation ... intergroup offices.

... the status of these faithful servants was almost unbearable. They weren’t asked to speak at A.A. meetings because they were “making money out of A.A.” ... **a necessary evil.**

Tradition 8 – Bill's Essay pp. 168 - 173

They thought they could regain some measure of virtue, it was thought, if they worked for A.A. real cheap.

[hardworking secretary] was not professionalizing the Twelfth Step; **she was just making it possible**

At the Foundation, Eight tons of books, sacks of letters, a lonely heart Eskimo, growing pains of thousands of groups,

answered by people who *know*.

Right contacts with the world outside have to be maintained.

Tradition 8 – Bill’s Essay pp. 168 - 173

Perhaps the fear will always lurk in every A.A. heart that one day our name will be exploited by somebody for real cash. Even the suggestion of such a thing never fails to whip up a hurricane, and we have discovered that hurricanes have a way of mauling with equal severity both the just and the unjust.

A university wanted an A.A. member to educate the public on alcoholism

A corporation wanted a personnel man familiar with [alcoholism]

A state drunk farm wanted a manager

A state alcohol commission wanted a paid researcher

Are such activities to be branded as professionalism under A.A. tradition? We think the answer is “No.....”

A.A.’s so employed recklessly broke anonymity to **thump the tub for their pet enterprise.** For this reason, some very good causes and all connected with them suffered unjust criticism from A.A. groups.

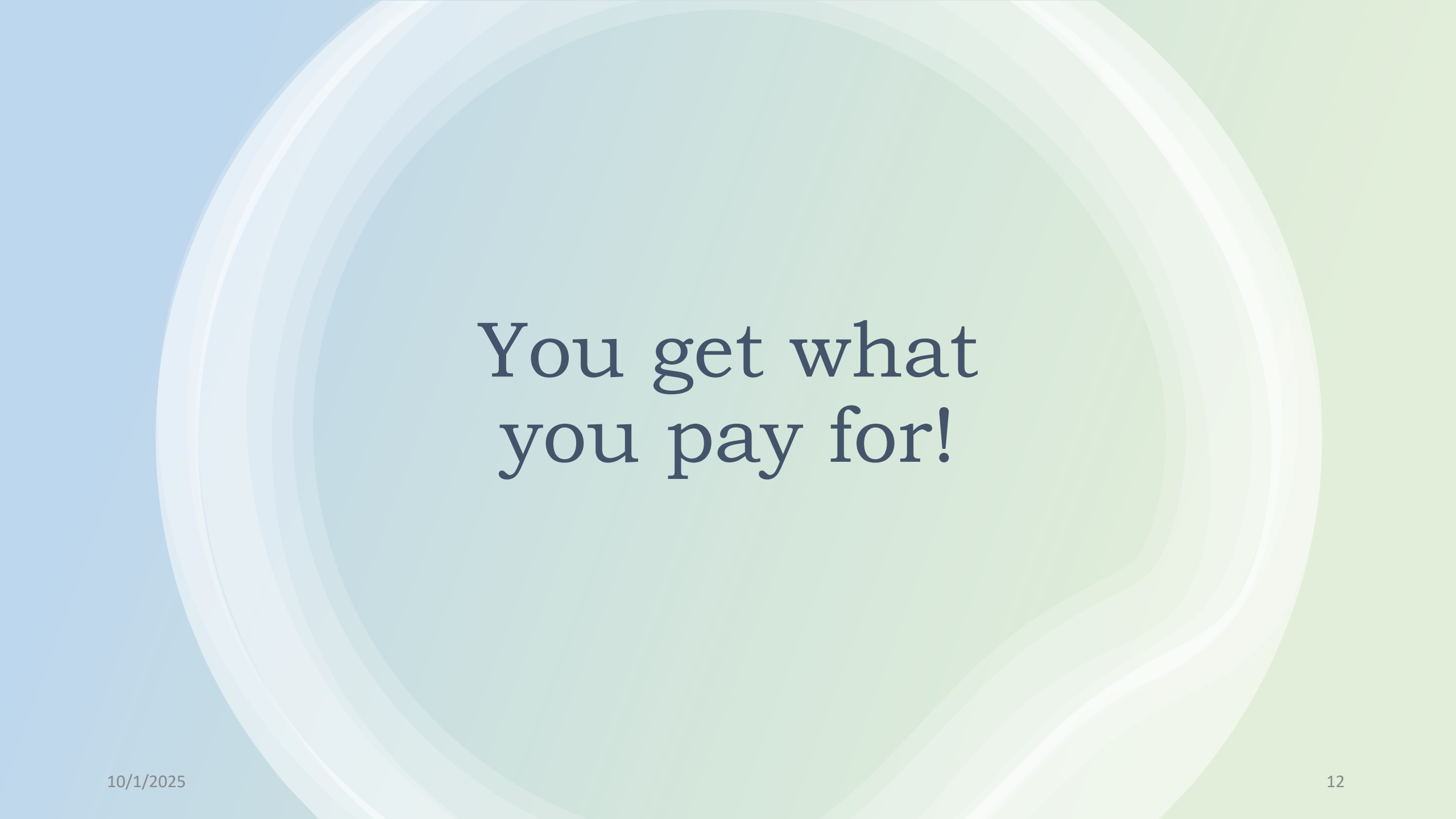
Tradition 8 – Bill’s Essay pp. 168 - 173

Yet not a single of them had been hired to do A.A.’s Twelfth Step work. The violation in these instances was not professionalism at all; it was breaking anonymity.

A.A.’s sole purpose was being compromised, and the name of Alcoholics Anonymous was being misused.

We see that we have no right or need to discourage A.A.’s who wish to work as individuals in these wider fields.

This is the exciting welter of events which has finally cast up A.A.’s Tradition of nonprofessionalism. **Our Twelfth Step is never to be paid for, but those who labor in service for us are worthy of their hire.**



You get what
you pay for!

Bill's essay (1950s) on this Tradition primarily focused on groups' paid workers that made Twelfth Step work possible in their immediate proximity, such as clubs.

That included maintenance of facilities, answering phones and written queries, and other supporting tasks.

Furthermore, (the Foundation) Headquarters needed paid workers so that they could answer the countless pleas for help from all across the country and across the world.

Headquarters evolved to become the General Service Office (G.S.O.) and Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. (A.A.W.S.).

And there are now sixty-six General Service Offices and Literature Distribution Centers all across the world.

We'll track the progression from the A.A. of Bill's essay to the A.A. of today by dividing the Long form into four parts.

Through this progression, we'll see, "*The anvils of experience that led to hammering out A.A.'s Eighth Tradition.*"

Part I of the Long Form

*Alcoholics Anonymous should remain
forever non-professional.*



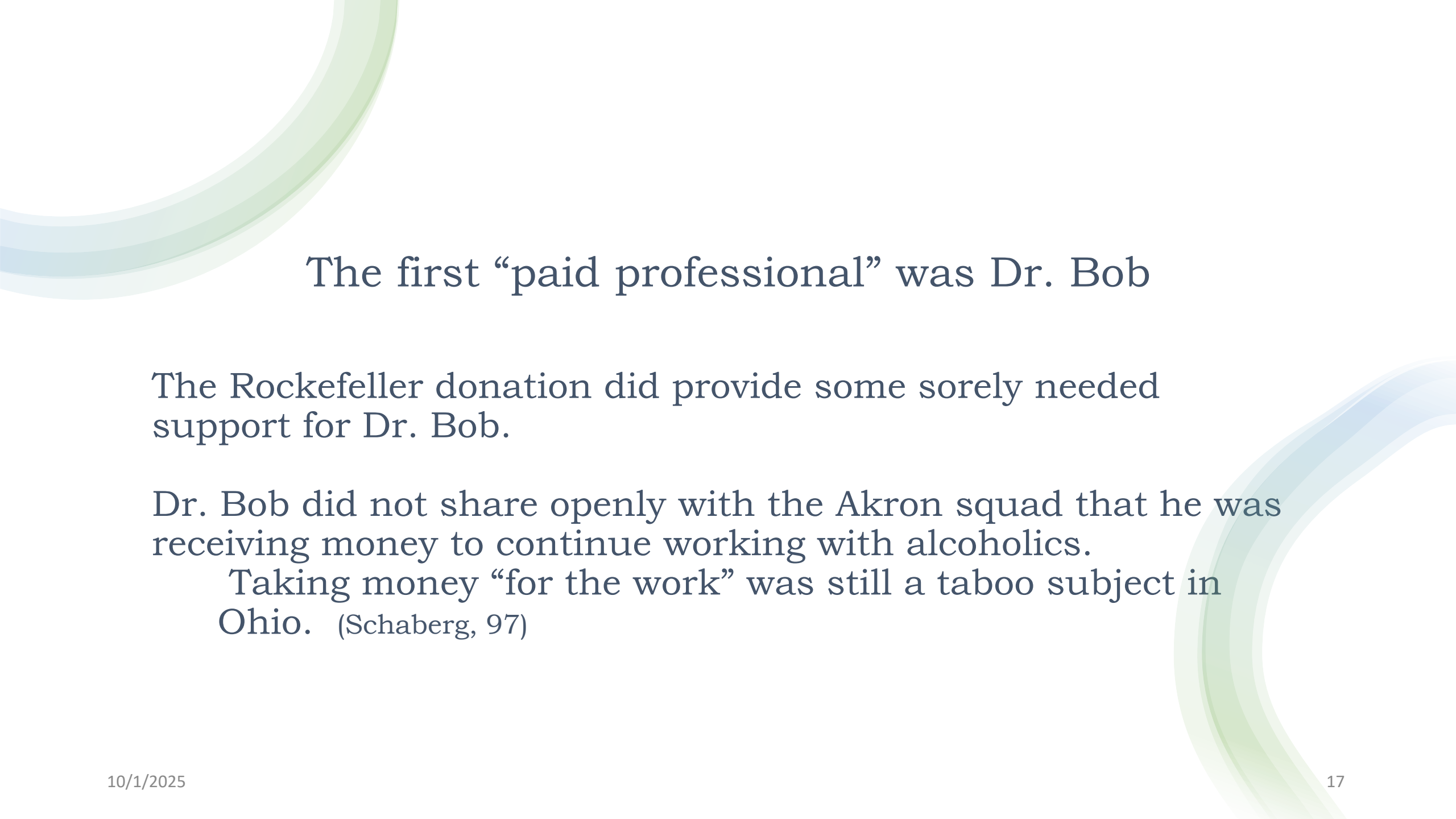
The hallmark of the early Fellowship: working with others for free

The hazards of some early alcoholics' expectations included the belief that Fellowship members should work with others for free

and voluntarily do the nitty-gritty and time-consuming labors that expanded the program's reach.

This unrealistic expectation would result in a hard-fought battle between the economic survival of A.A.'s early members and the survival of A.A. itself.

The problem centered around delineating actual 12th step work from the work that makes 12th step work possible.



The first “paid professional” was Dr. Bob

The Rockefeller donation did provide some sorely needed support for Dr. Bob.

Dr. Bob did not share openly with the Akron squad that he was receiving money to continue working with alcoholics.

Taking money “for the work” was still a taboo subject in Ohio. (Schaberg, 97)

March 1938, Dr. Bob received \$500 from the Alcoholic Fund.
(Schaberg, 98)

September 1938 to April 1939, the Alcoholic Foundation allocated \$200 a month to Dr. Bob. (Schaberg, 241)

March 1939, when the Foundation Trustees realized funds were needed to get the book printed, they assigned to Bill the unpleasant task of telling Dr. Bob his monthly payments would be reduced to \$50 for several months. (Schaberg, 550-551)

Dr. Bob was upset!

The perils of relying on outside support for one's livelihood.

During the period that Dr. Bob was receiving financial support, Bill, Hank, and Fitz M. scrambled to find more funding while they continued to craft future policies for A.A and work on the book.

In short, Dr. Bob was paid to do what was eventually called Twelfth Step work

Bill, Hank, and Fitz frantically sought support to make Twelfth Step work possible.

Quite the reverse of the Eighth Tradition!

Part II of the Long Form

We define professionalism as the occupation of counseling alcoholics for fees or hire.



Bill's first struggle with professionalism

Charles Towns' (1936) job offer had to be tempting for Bill especially given he was just over one year sober and had great difficulty finding a stable income.

Hank, via the group conscience, helped Bill to see the ramifications of this very difficult decision.

“This job offer is one of the more fateful turning points in A.A.’s history. Who knows what might have happened if [Bill] had actually become a lay therapist.”
(Schaberg, 100)

Dr. Bob's future compensation was a stark contrast to Towns' offer.

The obvious problem with the lay therapist job was that Bill's results would have benefited and been credited to Towns Hospital.

In contrast, Dr. Bob's pay originated from a donation given to the Fellowship for developing the program.

That is, Dr. Bob's work directly helped the Fellowship by growing the number of recovered alcoholics, which in turn provided for the book more evidence that the program worked.

The distinctions were in the motive for support and the source of income.

Even though he was disappointed, Charles Towns continued to keep Bill, Hank and Fitz on their feet financially without any obligation to the hospital.

In short, the three men received pay for helping Bill get the book across the finish line.

For making 12th Step work possible!

A.A. members in alcohol recovery related fields

It is logical and valuable for A.A.s to enter professionally related fields. They need only avoid breaking their A.A. anonymity.

. . . that A.A.'s going into alcohol therapy should never trade on their A.A. connection; that there is not, and can never be, any such thing as an "A.A. therapist." (A.A. Tradition, 32)

A.A.s in recovery-related fields are wonderful! Such professionals certainly can recommend A.A. to their clients!

But when A.A.'s break their anonymity with clients or others at their place of employment, they pose **at least two hazards**:

1. The implication that **paid 12th step work** is acceptable in some situations; and
2. That their place of employment is affiliated with A.A.

A.A.'s in recovery-related fields can do unpaid 12th step work when they are not working at their jobs.

Part III of the Long Form

But we may employ alcoholics where they are going to perform those services for which we might otherwise have to engage nonalcoholics. Such special services may be well recompensed.



Tensions surface over control of the book's sales

April 1939, Bill, Hank, and forty-four-ish share-holders controlled Works Publishing – and, in effect, owned the newly published book.

Bill and Ruth Hock were continuing to work on behalf of the Fellowship in Hank's Honors Dealers office in New Jersey.

Discouragingly, work at that time generally consisted of going to the mailbox to see only a trickle of queries about the book. In the meantime,

Hank started drinking.

September and October 1939, the trickle of inquiries became a flood of calls and correspondence.

Bill wanted to move the A.A. office to Manhattan where there were more volunteers available to help.

Hank was understandably upset as he probably could feel his lifeline of control slipping away.

Late 1939, Hank wrote a disjointed letter to Bill that reverberated with active alcoholism.

Hank's letter to Bill was a desperate attempt to keep the potentially lucrative Works Publishing separate from the Alcoholic Foundation.

In a conflation of reasonable questions and distracting platitudes, Hank's plausible questions included:

“Would money that would be spent on an office be better spent for traveling expenses for people spreading the good news?” and

“Would an office tend to take away the endearing amateurism of this work and tend to professionalize it?” (*Pass It On*, 229)

I honestly believe a tide is rising on the book. You and I are going to profit from it if it rises high enough. If and when the time came, I think we would find it the subject of less criticism if the book company be the giver, not the receiver. . .

That is, Hank and Bill should keep their two-thirds ownership of Works Publishing and thus, two-thirds of the profits.

Bill knew that the Fellowship was already starting to fall apart over the stock deal. Hank's suggestion definitely would have resulted in more criticism if not a full-scale revolt. *(Pass It On, 230)*

Another point – essentially, Works Publishing Company, if successful, must be a business organization. Does this mix with humanitarian and charitable work?

. . . . In other words, how can you successfully operate what might be a large business organization when everyone naturally feels a proprietary interest in it? (*Pass It On*, 230)

Here, Hank's point was very important in that Works Publishing eventually would have to incorporate to adhere to business laws for the state of New York. . . . which meant facing the perils of money and property!

However, Hank failed to see that incorporation did not preclude oversight by the Foundation.

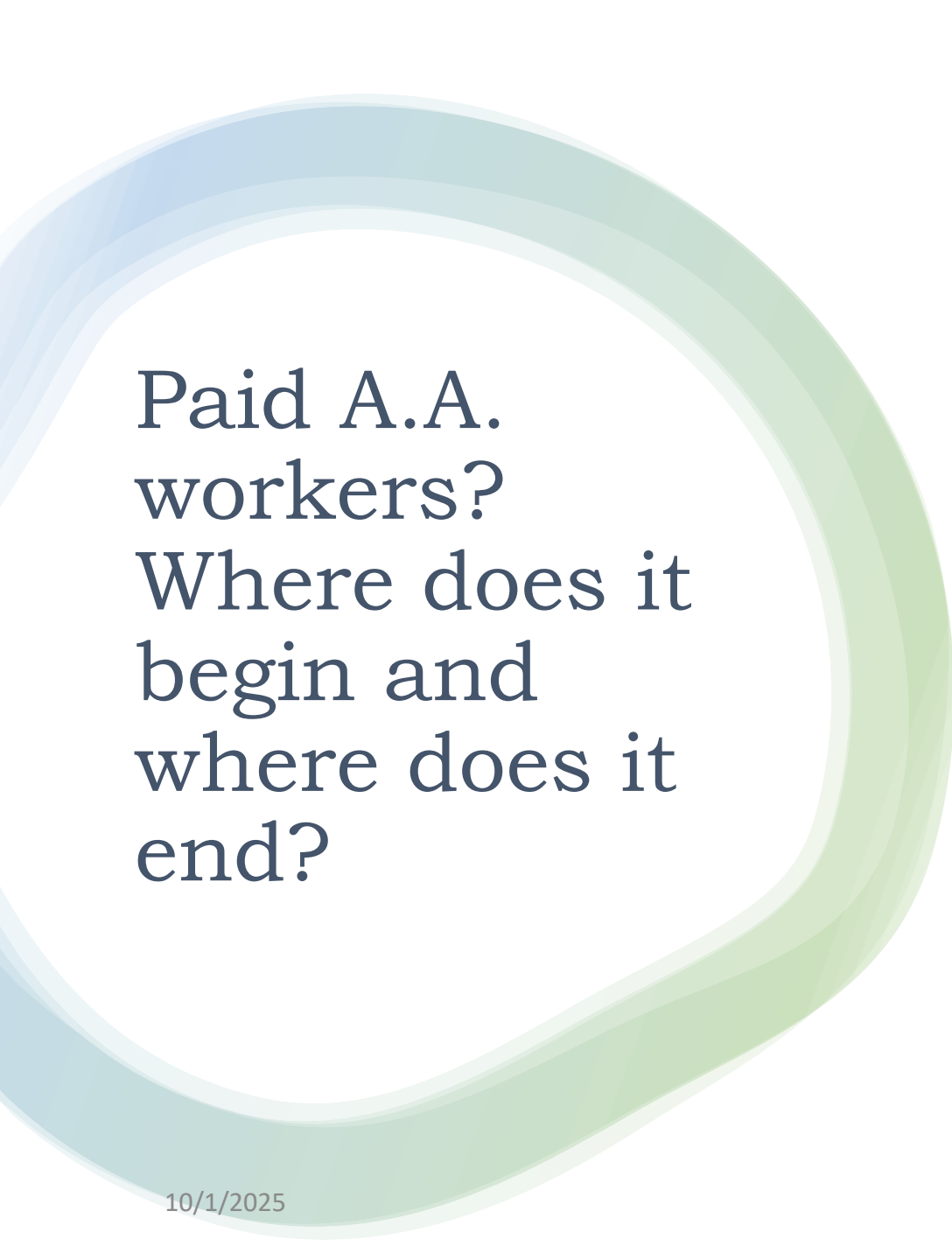
Bill's reply to Hank made it clear that their days of making freewheeling business decisions on behalf of the Fellowship had come to an end.

“The gang's money have gone into the venture; they have contributed material for half of the book; and the book and the work are unavoidably tied together.” (*Pass It On*, 230-231)

When the book was written, I know I found it sometimes hard to accept suggestions and ideas from you when they really should have been accepted.

And then it comes to the business end of our deal. I think you have always had the same difficulty in considering my advice.

Another point – the gang would like you to come back with us very much. *(Pass It On, 230 – 231)*



Paid A.A.
workers?
Where does it
begin and
where does it
end?

“From the beginning, we have wrestled with the question of the paid alcoholic worker. He seemed an absolute necessity and probably was that until recently.” (*Pass It On*, 222)

Bill acknowledged that such compensation was essential to getting the book published but that it had to end for the sake of not professionalizing Twelfth Step work.

As a result, the co-founders carried the burden of starting a life-saving program that was growing beyond comprehension and, at the same time, was taxing their ability to survive and support their families.

This sticky problem would take a very long time to resolve through “the very careful wording of the A.A. Eighth Tradition.”

Pass It On, 223

The Big Book itself was a complex issue that contributed to the problem.



Did the Big Book professionalize Twelfth Step work?

After the Foundation secured ownership of the Big Book, the Trustees awarded Dr. Bob royalties, in part to compensate for the loss of income he had suffered in order to get the book printed. (*Dr. Bob & Good Oldtimers.*, 269)

Wouldn't royalties from the sales of the book be considered paid Twelfth Step work?

As much as Bill was trying to encourage unity by respecting the group consciences, in this instance, he insisted that the Foundation should sell the book.

In later years, he could point to this particular decision to override the group conscience as one that was pivotal to A.A.'s future success

Our history proves that the sometimes idealistic majority of that day was seriously mistaken. Had there been no book earnings for the Headquarters and no royalties for Dr. Bob and me, A.A. would have taken a very different and probably disastrous course.

Easier to see in retrospect, Bill continued to paint a vivid picture of the disasters that would have followed, including no Traditions and no General Service Conference.

(Pass It On, 322 – 323)

Dr. Bob provided evidence that the program worked and,

Bill wrote the book.

The book royalties he received were not payment for Twelfth Step work; they were payment for special services; but the money nonetheless freed his time to do the Twelfth Step work that he unceasingly did. Tradition Eight also made acceptable the proper compensation, in years to come of other special workers. *(Pass It On, 323)*

Part IV of the Long Form

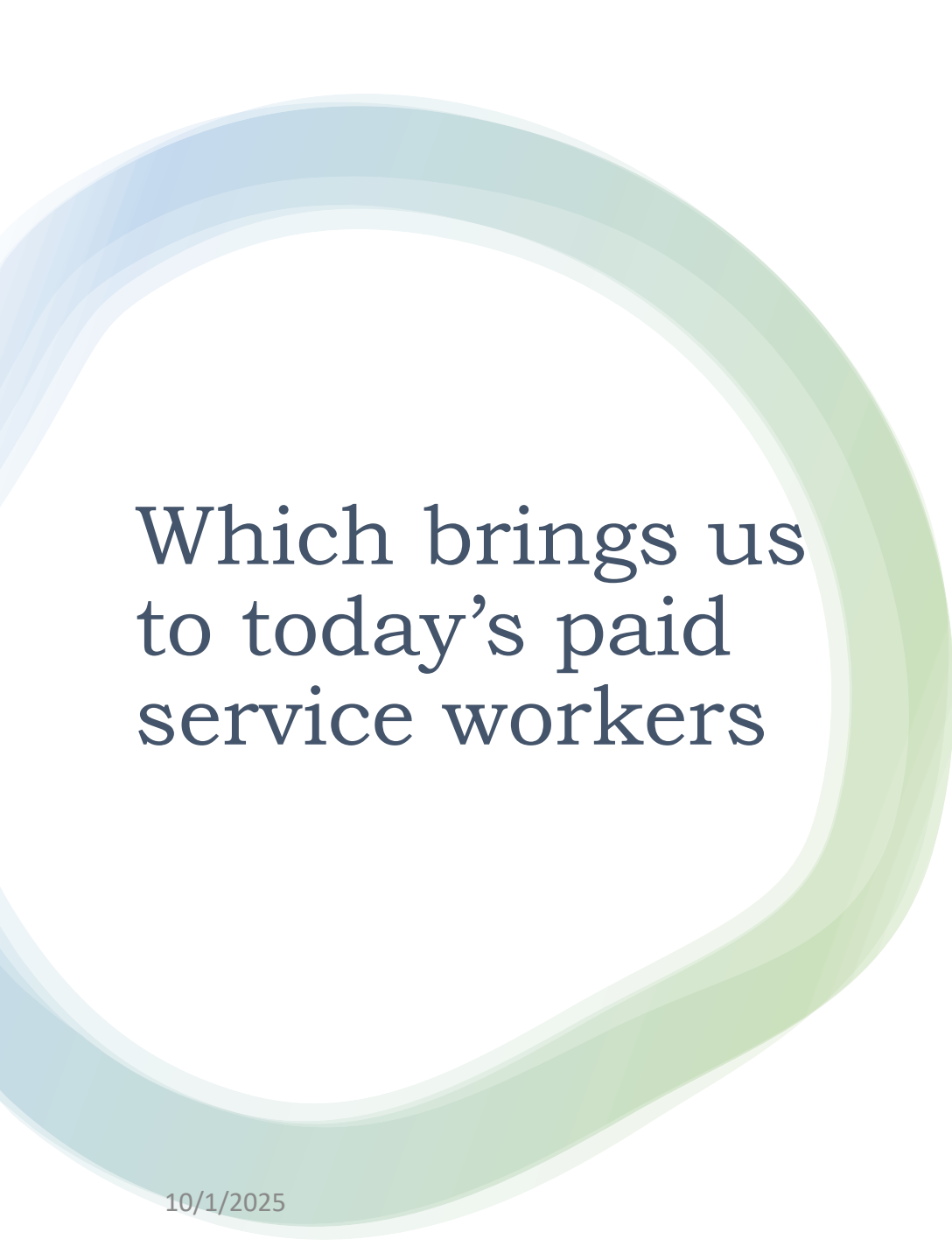
*But our usual A.A. Twelfth Step
work is never to be paid for.*



Today, Bill would probably add “or a paid A.A. Step sponsor.”

This unfortunate departure from A.A.’s spiritual principle of Twelfth Step work freely given currently does occur.

However, two people are complicit: the one who is charging the fee and the one who is paying the fee.



Which brings us to today's paid service workers

Intergroup and Central Office and other A.A. entities around the world.

Rely on volunteers but may employ special workers: Purchase literature and other materials, answer inquiries, refer new prospects to members, and facilitate committees' activities including local outreach.

Per Tradition Nine, a committee of A.A. volunteers manage or have oversight over these important offices' finances and staff.

General Service Conferences

1955 “Conference” became the General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous and was established as the guardian of the World Services of A.A. and of the Twelve Traditions.

First Conference Charter - “Conference (North American Section)” would be a service body only, never a government for A.A.

Other “Sections” of the Conference established in foreign lands to accommodate language and geographical needs.

General Service Conference U.S./Canada

Decide on A.A. policy, literature, and other current issues.

The 135 members of the Conference include Delegates (unpaid) from 93 Areas in the U.S. and Canada.

21 Trustees who are volunteers (unpaid), six non-Trustee Directors, and 15 A.A. paid staff.

Concept IV – Right of Participation

A.A. paid staff serve the set of Trustees committees and their corresponding Conference Committees (Literature, P.I., C.P.C., etc.).

Conferences are steering committees of volunteers and paid workers – decision-makers for A.A.'s services

But without an office to carry out the decisions of the Conference, nothing would ever get done!

Over 70 years of rapid growth in A.A. worldwide has resulted in sixty-six General Service Offices (G.S.O.) and Literature Distribution Centers around the world

A wealth of information to help groups under their geographical areas to operate effectively within and beyond their meetings

Paid Service Workers at the General Service Office

1955 – Alcoholic Foundation Office or “Headquarters” became the General Service Office.

Standing offices, sometimes referred to as “Desks,” are Literature, Corrections, Public Information (PI), Cooperation with the Professional Community (CPC), Accessibilities and Treatment, Group Services, and Archives.

Conference, Regional Forums, and International Conferences.

Administrative offices essential for running a business operation such as IT Services, and Digital Media.

At the General Service Office in New York:

Twelve staff, who are also members of A.A., rotate their positions every two years.

70,000 groups or 1.4 million members.

1,500 groups or 38,000 members in corrections facilities.

And, they serve the Conference.

(2022. "Estimates of A.A. Groups and Members as of December 31, 2021, SM F-53)

Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. (A.A.W.S)

A.A.W.S.'s purview is over all services, publishing, finance, archives, and it is responsible for A.A.'s website and broad publishing efforts.

Translated literature includes Arabic, Bulgarian, Chinese, Indonesian, Italian, Punjabi, and Zulu languages to name only a very few.

Loners-Internationalists Meeting bulletin for members who are in remote areas, are serving in occupations not tied to a geographic region such as the merchant sailors, or are culturally restricted from participating in A.A. events

The International Office staff serve as a liaison to general service offices in other countries and respond to queries from outside the U.S. and Canada.

Free service material - resources based on groups' experiences, some A.A. historical summaries, and A.A. data capsules.

49,000 groups or almost 500,000 members outside of the U.S. and Canada

120,000 groups or almost 2 million members worldwide.

180 countries, including 66 autonomous general service offices outside of the U.S. and Canada.

How do Conferences and General Service Offices Collaborate?

The World Service Meeting (WSM), started in 1969 and now biennial, is held alternately in New York and an overseas country.

The meeting is an unincorporated association of service structures of Alcoholics Anonymous in various countries.

The International Office in A.A.W.S. organizes and provides the report for A.A.'s World Service Meeting.

A.A. Grapevine and LaViña.

Publisher of multimedia content that is accessed directly from the Fellowship.

The A.A. Grapevine carries the message through print, streaming, and other platforms.

Embraced as the “international journal of Alcoholics Anonymous.”

A.A. Grapevine, Inc. also produces a bimonthly Spanish-language magazine, LaViña.

The General Service Board has custodial oversight over both of these corporations, which it exercises by electing the directors of each. While the General Service Board does not interfere with the daily operation of either corporation, it does have the ultimate responsibility for seeing that both operate in the best interest of the Fellowship as a whole.
(*The A.A. Service Manual*, 86)

Two boards of directors - A.A.W.S. and Grapevine,
Concept IV right of participation
Well-informed and highly unified boards of directors, and
Ruled out authoritarian and institutional operation styles that would conflict with A.A. principles.

Hank P. thought that A.A. should separate the spiritual from the material by keeping the publishing company separate from the Foundation.

It turns out that A.A. has separated the material, but has retained spiritual accountability through its volunteers and paid staff.

Hank could not imagine a system that would separate the material from the spiritual. Bill created that system through A.A.'s service structure and the *Twelve Traditions* and *Twelve Concepts*.

Those who labor in service for A.A. are worthy of their hire

Like the expenses of other A.A. activities, those of the General Service Office are met generally by group and individual contributions.

Since these contributions do not completely cover the cost of A.A.'s world services, publishing income is used to help offset the deficit. (The A.A. Group, 34 – 35)

It seems Bill's choice to over-ride the group conscience about giving the Big Book away may have been a good decision...

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Coming up: the Ninth Tradition

The Eighth and the Ninth Traditions make possible a service structure that allows A.A.'s around the world to share the solution to their common problem, alcoholism.

Next, we will explore the structure of A.A.'s volunteer service committees. There are inextricable connections between Tradition Eight and Tradition Nine. Those connections ensure our unity and common welfare worldwide.

And we will ask the question, “Are alcoholics able to be responsible for Alcoholics Anonymous?”

Comments and questions?

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